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I am submitting this testimony to urge your support for our proposal to amend Senate Bill 129, which is currently before your committee, with language to reopen the Southbury Training School ("STS") to new admissions.

Southbury Training School is less than 30 minutes from Newtown Connecticut, and is one of the last remaining state-run treatment centers in the country, a model institution of how to handle a severely mentally ill population. It is being forced to close through attrition. I was born and raised in Fairfield County, Connecticut, and my mentally retarded uncle was a ward of the state for most of his life. We visited him 2 times a month, and brought him home for those weekends, hoping that he would not burn the house down, or get hit by a car, or paint the refrigerator with house paint, or get beat by some passerby for his inappropriate behavior. Southbury Training School was a godsend for so many parents who could not handle this kind of child. In the last years of Victor's life, we saw the GOVERNMENT OF CONNECTICUT TRYING TO MOVE ALL OF THE PATIENTS OUT OF THE MENTAL INSTITUTION AND CLOSE IT.

But Connecticut can find other things to do with that money, like making more expensive parks and flower gardens and nature interpretive walks. They are in the process of closing it now, this institution of little cottages, a village of cottages where 20 patients and 3 attendants had their own safe environments, homes grouped according to mental ability, men's and women's cottages, a complete lock down campus. Parents, like my grandma, unable to cope with the impossibility of having them at home, had a refuge. This population is the docile type of mental illness, including down's syndrome, they have screaming or crying fits, some bang their heads on the walls, some seizures, others staring into the sky, others stealing things and hiding them from everyone else. I would cry to walk in there and see the dedication of the staff to hold all of these people together as a family in each unit.

Before the attrition program started, STS was a vibrant campus, its own self-contained town. There was a campus laundry, a power plant, school, and hospital. All of the homes were full, all of the clients were SAFE, everyone watched out for everyone else. Anyone who drove a car onto campus realized that many of the clients did not know how to cross the street. Meals were shared family style, those who could helped to cook and clean up. Holidays celebrated together, tv time, music, a FAMILY; Special Olympics were the highlight of the year -everyone received a ribbon. STS supported the social, physical, and very special mental care needed for the special population. It worked well, it was the solution.

The solution of Connecticut's "advisors" is to put these people in half-way houses, or "privatized homes". Can you imagine putting people, some of who cannot talk and only grunt, who do not know how to use money, who cannot cross the street, who are wide open to situations like sexual abuse, they want to "integrate them into society", throw them to the wolves, while shutting down the mental institutions that provided safety by sequestering them. Our family has joined other families to fight to keep this state-run mental institution alive.

Now there is another kind of mental institution, it is for the violent type, not the docile type that I just wrote about. And many of these new rich families who moved to Newtown do not know this history, but Newtown used to be the home of an institute campus for the violent mentally ill. When I was a kid, if you were doing something crazy-like, there was a joke "If you keep acting that way, we are going to send you to Newtown!" That is where they had the strait jackets and padded rooms. How ironic that this mentally disturbed man murdered those kids in the very town where the mental institution once stood. Did Connecticut learn any lessons? Now they want to close the other mental institution?

There is no PLACE FOR THESE PEOPLE TO GO, both the docile mentally ill or the violent mentally ill. The system takes some of them and puts them on Social Security, then they struggle with meager funds to find a place to live, food, psych meds, living in poverty, struggling, no counseling, ISOLATION; it is horrible to watch our broken system. NOW THE PRISONS or THE STREETS IS WHERE MANY END UP. All with our **do-gooder clueless inexperienced professionals counseling** STATE GOVERNMENTS TO DO NEW-FANGLED POLITICALLY-CORRECT MAINSTREAMING OF PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT MAINSTREAM AND NEED SPECIAL HELP.

WE NEED OUR STATE-RUN Mental Institutions to remain open, and more to be reopened. Prison is not the solution, it only makes matters worse. Half way homes and the street are not the solution, these people are not functioning at a high enough level to be integrated into an outside-world-type neighborhood, it is too dangerous. The mentally ill have malfunctioning brain chemistry. In the case of my uncle, the babysitter dropped him on the soft spot on his head when he was an infant. At age 60, he was evaluated to have the brain of a 2 year old. Our current system wants to throw him to the wolves. I thank God we had the Southbury Training School to help our family, and thank God that he passed away 4 years ago before they kicked him out into the privatized hell holes, he died with his Southbury Training School family surrounding his hospital bed.

I am so damned outraged at the government of Connecticut and the hell that they are putting the families through as they shut down the last of it. If they only knew, if they only spent some time checking out the reality instead of pushing papers at a desk.

I am submitting this testimony to urge your support for our proposal to amend Senate Bill 129, which is currently before your committee, with language to reopen the Southbury Training School ("STS") to new admissions.

We believe that STS is a crucial part of Connecticut's system of care for the intellectually and developmentally disabled, and that reopening the doors at STS will both revitalize the facility and benefit many more people in the surrounding community.

STS is a state-run Intermediate Care Facility that meets strict federal standards. In addition to providing comprehensive services to the people who live there, STS provides dental and other services to more than 500 community-based clients of the Department of Developmental Services.

Most of the residents of STS are severely disabled, suffering from intellectual, physical, and medical disabilities. STS offers an array of services that are crucial to the well-being of this population. They include 24/7 on-site medical staff, a health care unit that enables individuals to receive care that would otherwise be available only in a hospital or nursing home, staff psychiatrists who are familiar with the history of each resident, an experienced staff with minimal turnover and a dental clinic.

Due to both a court order, which is no longer in effect, and a bill passed by the Connecticut Legislature without the input of STS families or guardians, new admissions to STS have been blocked since 1986. As a result, the fixed costs of operating STS have been spread since the 1980s over a steadily shrinking base of residents, and the cost of care per resident has steadily risen. This has periodically fueled an argument from opponents of the facility that it should be closed.

We believe that allowing new admissions to STS would accomplish the following:

- New admissions would result in a lowered cost of care per resident at the facility and help make it financially viable.
- New admissions would shorten or possibly eliminate a growing waiting list for residential care and services for intellectually disabled people throughout the state.
- New admissions would allow STS to continue and possibly expand its role as a resource for dental and medical care for community-based clients of DDS.

Regards,

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